The crowd was bursting with anticipation. Excited children wriggled and squirmed as parents tried unsuccessfully to quiet them. Finally, with one swift stroke, the ribbon was cut heralding the opening of the new Children's Wing at the Huntington Beach Library and Cultural Center.

"We've been waiting a long time for this to open," said Lori Hicks of Huntington Beach, who brought her two children.

Saturday's opening was the culmination of four years of planning, fund raising and construction on the $8.5 million, 43,000-square-foot expansion, which includes a children's storytime theater, a 319-seat community theater and a computer room for toddlers to sixth-graders.

"It's a dream come true," said Nanci Williams, children's library services coordinator. "I wanted a place the children could call their own. A magical place they will remember for the rest of their lives."

Children were captivated by the 650-gallon circular aquarium. Their faces pressed against the glass, watching in awe as the yellow and blue fish swam in and out of the coral.

Others embarked on the treasure hunt and discovered clues and information about all the different areas in the center.

After the treasure hunt, Tri Tran, 12, wasted no time in getting down to business.

"I've got a paper due on Egyptian mummies for social science class," he said as he worked the reference computer keyboard like a pro.

The Tabby Storytime Theater was a popular attraction. Parents and children enthusiastically participated in an interactive story and sing-along.

"This is great. I'm a full believer in education. I want Phillip to be around books and literary people," said Dave Gminski of Huntington Beach, who brought his 3-year-old son, Phillip.

Other parents also were advocates of teaching their kids at an early age to love and respect books.
"I encourage my kids to read so that they'll be more academically inclined," said Robert Smythe of Huntington Beach as he balanced Shannon, 3, and Kyle, 1 1/2, on his knees. "Reading is more entertaining to them than watching TV."

Lounging on a yellow cushion propped up against the Toddler Discovery Boat, Jourdan Gallemore, 11, paused for a break. "This place is really nice. I'm going to read my favorite fiction author, Lane Smith, and play games in the computer center."

Graphic:
MAP

Caption:
Map: Site of new Central Library in Huntington Beach.
The Orange County Register

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Accession Number: OCR522907